

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 05036 192237Z

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAJ-01 /066 W

----- 031806

R 192055Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7999

INFO ALL EC CAPITALS 0026

AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 05036

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, FR

SUBJECT: GOF REACTS TO OPPOSITION ACTIVITY

SUMMARY. GISCARD HAS APPARENTLY GIVEN HIS PRINCIPAL AIDES THE GREEN LIGHT TO CARRY HIS GOVERNMENT'S MESSAGE ON A VARIETY OF ISSUES DIRECTLY TO THE PUBLIC. THE RESULT HAS BEEN A SPATE OF PUBLIC APPEARANCES BY LEADING MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT, AIMED AT DRAWING ITS ATTENTION AWAY FROM RECENT INITIATIVES BY THE SOCIALIST AND COMMUNIST OPPOSITION AND AT PREPARING THE WAY FOR CANTONAL ELECTIONS IN MARCH (SEPTEL). END SUMMARY.

1. JANUARY AND EARLY FEBRUARY WERE A PERIOD DOMINATED BY ACTIVITY ON THE LEFT, FOCUSED MAINLY ON THE HELSINGOR AND PARIS MEETINGS OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE PCF ANNUAL CONGRESS. EACH OF THESE EVENTS GENERATED LENGTHY DEBATES IN THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA, TO THE POINT THAT SOME INDEPENDENT AND EVEN LOYAL PRO-GOF COMMENTATORS

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 05036 192237Z

BEGAN CRITICIZING GISCARD FOR ALLOWING A PUBLICITY

VACUUM INTO WHICH THE OPPOSITION STEPPED ONLY TOO CONVENIENTLY. A CONFIRMATION OF THIS VIEW CAN BE READ INTO A SOFRES/FIGARO POLL, TAKEN RIGHT AFTER THE PCF CONGRESS AND PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 19, WHICH SHOWED THAT THOSE HOLDING A FAVORABLE OPINION OF THE PCF INCREASED FOUR POINTS AND THOSE WITH AN UNFAVORABLE OPINION DECREASED SIX POINTS. (THE PS HELD ITS OWN WHILE THE MAJORITY DROPPED SLIGHTLY IN POPULARITY).

2. IN RESPONSE TO THESE CRITICISMS AND ACTING ON ADVICE FROM FRIENDLY COUNSELORS, GISCARD SUPPOSEDLY TOLD HIS MINISTERS DURING LAST WEEK'S COUNCIL OF MINISTERS' MEETING TO GET OUT AND POLITICK. SHORTLY THEREAFTER, FINANCE MINISTER FOURCADE ACCEPTED THE CHALLENGE BY PS FIRST SECRETARY FRANCOIS MITTERRAND TO DEBATE ON TV THE ECONOMIC SITUATION (SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 2), UDR SECRETARY GENERAL ANDRE BORD WROTE A FULL-PAGE ARTICLE IN LE MONDE CRITICIZING MITTERRAND'S ECONOMIC PROGRAM, PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC WAS INTERVIEWED FOR TWO HOURS ON RADIO FROM HIS CORREZE CONSTITUENCY AND MINISTER OF INDUSTRY D'ORNANO FORCEFULLY REITERATED THE MAJORITY POSITION THAT THE COMMUNISTS MIGHT CHANGE THEIR METHODS, BUT NOT THEIR GOALS. IN ADDITION THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS APPEARANCES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL AROUND THE COUNTRY.

3. DOES THIS MEAN THAT GISCARD IS ALARMED AT THE ATTENTION AND INCREASED POPULARITY ATTRACTED BY THE LEFT? TO BELIEVE MEMBERS OF GISCARD'S PARTY WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN, THE PRESIDENT IS EXUDING THE SAME CONFIDENCE IN HIS POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE OPPOSITION AS A FEW MONTHS AGO. POLLS, THEY CONTINUE, ARE NOT TO BE EXAGGERATED AND MUST BE ANALYZED IN VIEW OF THE TIME THEY WERE TAKEN. WHAT'S IMPORTANT ARE VOTER INDICATIONS BEFORE ELECTIONS; KEEPING IN THE 50 PERCENT RANGE (WHERE THE MAJORITY IS NOW) BETWEEN ELECTIONS IS A SAFE POSITION FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

4. COMMENT: ANOTHER REASON FOR GETTING OUT ON THE HUSTINGS, IN ADDITION TO NOT WANTING TO LEAVE THE INITIATIVE TO THE OPPOSITION, IS GOF WORRY THAT THEY MAY CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 05036 192237Z

TAKE SOME KNOCKS IN THE CANTONAL ELECTIONS, WHICH DETERMINE THE COMPOSITION OF DEPARTMENT COUNCILS, SET FOR MARCH 7 AND 14. MEMBERS OF THE MAJORITY EXPECT SOME LOSSES TO THE LEFT, BUT ARE NOT SURE OF THE EXTENT OF THE POTENTIAL DAMAGE. THROUGHOUT THIS ENTIRE EXERCISE, GISCARD HAS PLAYED HIS USUAL GAME OF "STAYING ABOVE THE FRAY", LEAVING THE ROUGH AND TUMBLE OF POLITICAL DEBATE TO HIS PRINCIPAL AIDES.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, INFORMATION MEDIA, POLITICAL SITUATION, ELECTION FORECASTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 FEB 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976PARIS05036
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760063-0865
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760234/aaaabdx.tel
Line Count: 116
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 APR 2004 by greeneet>; APPROVED <11 AUG 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOF REACTS TO OPPOSITION ACTIVITY SUMMARY. GISCARD HAS APPARENTLY GIVEN HIS PRINCIPAL
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, FR, (GISCARD D'ESTAING, VALERY)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006